

## EXECUTIVE SESSION

## EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, I move to proceed to executive session to consider Calendar No. 919.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to the motion.

The motion was agreed to.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the nomination.

The legislative clerk read the nomination of Mary T. Boyle, of Maryland, to be a Commissioner of the Consumer Product Safety Commission for a term of seven years from October 27, 2018.

## CLOTURE MOTION

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, I send a cloture motion to the desk.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The cloture motion having been presented under rule XXII, the Chair directs the clerk to read the motion.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

## CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, do hereby move to bring to a close debate on the nomination of Executive Calendar No. 919, Mary T. Boyle, of Maryland, to be a Commissioner of the Consumer Product Safety Commission for a term of seven years from October 27, 2018.

Charles E. Schumer, Richard Blumenthal, Christopher A. Coons, Richard J. Durbin, Jeanne Shaheen, Catherine Cortez Masto, Margaret Wood Hassan, Jack Reed, Jacky Rosen, Benjamin L. Cardin, Amy Klobuchar, Ron Wyden, Debbie Stabenow, Jeff Merkley, Michael F. Bennet, Christopher Murphy, Edward J. Markey.

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, finally, I ask unanimous consent that the mandatory quorum calls for the cloture motions filed today, June 13, be waived.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

## LEGISLATIVE SESSION

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, I move to proceed to legislative session.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to the motion.

The motion was agreed to.

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

## RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The minority leader is recognized.

## INFLATION

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, runaway inflation has pushed workers and families to the breaking point. According to one recent poll, nearly 60 percent of Americans are making an ef-

fort to drive less and cut back on electricity use. Three in four are pinching their budgets for food and entertainment outside the home, and two-thirds are bracing for prices to climb even higher in the coming year.

Six months ago, in December, President Biden told the American people we had reached the "peak"—the peak—"of the crisis" with inflation. He said that prices would start falling "over the next couple months." But like so many of Democrats' other confident predictions about our economy, the President's statement has proven completely false.

Friday morning's inflation report provided more official confirmation of what American consumers know painfully well: The Democrats' out-of-control inflation is not letting up. In fact, it is actually getting worse.

This year to May, consumer prices rose 8.6 percent, blowing away expectations, jumping a full percentage point over the previous month and setting—you guessed it—a new 40-year high. The data underneath tell a brutal story for working families and American businesses. The categories driving inflation last month were the ones they can't do without.

Overall energy prices clocked a year-on-year increase of nearly 35 percent. Drivers are paying 48.7 percent more at the pump. And fuel oil consumers have seen prices more than double.

Food costs continue to climb at over 10 percent. Grocery prices, in particular, hit nearly 12 percent inflation, the worst year since 1979. And full service restaurant prices saw their largest increase on record.

Of course, that is not to mention the 31-year high for inflation in the services sector, the 35-year high for rent inflation, or the 42-year high for rising airfare.

Day by day, all of these painful milestones add up to one simple reality: Americans' hard-earned dollars aren't going nearly as far as they once did. Runaway inflation has swallowed up any shot of rising pay bringing more prosperity. In fact, the average worker has seen a 3.9-percent pay cut in the last year.

One mother of two in Indiana recently reported that she is earning more than she ever has in her career but "says she still feels like she is financially losing ground." This is what she had to say:

I should be able to live on my own. I'm getting ready to pay rent and it's going to take every single dime I've made.

As one of my constituents in Barbourville put it recently, "We're cutting back on everything—and I mean everything. Gas, meat, bread, it's all expensive as hell. One moment you think you can afford to buy something, then you go to the store and it's like, 'Nope, can't get that anymore either.'"

And here is a real kicker. One young couple in Utah has taken to asking themselves weekly, "What did we spend money on that we could not have spent money on?"

Imagine if Washington Democrats were willing to engage in that sort of self-reflection. Remember, it was their policy choices that made this painful situation possible. It was the Democrats' choice to insist on flooding—flooding—the economy with trillions of dollars in liberal spending last spring. And it was Democrats' choice to spend months last summer and fall working on ways to pour even more gasoline on the fire, even though working families were already feeling the pinch of inflation.

The Democratic leader himself said last spring:

I do not think the dangers of inflation, at least in the near term, are very real.

None other than some of his own party's top economists warned the exact opposite. But Washington Democrats were not to be deterred. Working families' budgets took a backseat to the far-left's wish list, and now Democrats' decision is literally driving them off a cliff.

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Madam President, on another matter, the Senate is in the middle of proposing major legislation to expand healthcare access for veterans exposed to toxic substances in the line of duty. Doing right by our vets is a bipartisan priority. An 86-vote majority of us voted to begin processing this bill a few days back, myself included.

This legislation is not a minor fix; it is a series of major—major—changes to help more veterans. So the precise language of the final bill will have major consequences for veterans, for policy, and for government spending.

Republicans have pushed to get votes on a few commonsense amendments that would make this bipartisan bill even stronger for our veterans. For example, one of these amendments would make sure the veterans who are already in line—those who are waiting now, already in line—waiting for treatment under the current rules are not disserved or treated unfairly as an unintended consequence of the new expansion. Surely that should be completely without controversy.

Another amendment would clarify how the government accounts for the new funding to make sure the new legislation does not impose major unintended consequences on the appropriations process.

Another amendment would make it clear that new medical presumptions must rest on sound science, so Congress does not substitute our judgment for the experts'.

These are not controversial amendments. They are directly related to the substance of this bill. And given the magnitude of the changes under consideration, the Senators sponsoring these amendments have every right to expect votes on the floor. There is no reason why this important bipartisan bill should be denied a bipartisan floor process.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

#### GUN LEGISLATION

Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, I got the news, along with others, Sunday morning about the decision of 10 Republican and Democratic Senators to move forward with the proposal to deal with our Nation's epidemic of gun violence. I had a conversation with Senator CHRIS MURPHY, who has been one of our leaders on the Democratic side, about exactly what that meant and the help that we might be able to offer to him from the Senate Judiciary Committee.

I just want to say, at this moment, that I really want to commend my colleagues on both sides, Democrats and Republicans. I believe they made a good-faith effort to negotiate a package of reforms. Senator MURPHY, Senator CORNYN of Texas, made it bipartisan, timely, and I believe did an excellent job. Is it the package that I would have written? No—nor yours, Madam President. You would have included things, and I would have included others. But it is within our reach.

We have a bitterly politically divided nation. That is a fact. We have a Senate Judiciary Committee evenly divided 50–50. We have a Chamber evenly divided 50–50. So it is difficult to say that any one party or one person will get exactly what they want in this political atmosphere, but it is equally important to note that we have all gone home and gotten the message over and over again. Whether it was in reference to the supermarket killing in Buffalo, the fourth grade school class in Uvalde, TX, or the doctor and other bystanders being killed in a Tulsa, OK, hospital, all of that has occurred in the last few days.

The American people have reacted with one voice, and they have said to us two words: “Do something.” To Members of Congress, don't just tell us you are going to give us your thoughts and prayers. Do something.

Well, I think this decision to move forward could help. Every provision in this agreement could save a life. For that reason, if for no other, I will be supporting it.

This agreement would support “red flag” laws. It is one way they characterize them. “Crisis intervention orders” is another. Many States—19—already have them. It would also close dangerous gaps in Federal law that enable domestic abusive boyfriends to get guns.

I want to commend Senator KLOBUCHAR, who has been the leader in the U.S. Senate on that issue. We tried to help her on a previous piece of legislation, and it didn't have the votes to do it, but if it is included in this package, I will definitely support it, and I thank her for her leadership.

It also would strengthen the background check system by clarifying which gun sellers would be required to conduct background checks. That is a step in the right direction. I hope there is more coming.

The agreement would provide funds for desperately needed mental health and trauma support services, including more school counselors for enhanced school safety.

I can't tell you how critically important that is. Half of the people who die because of a gun in America commit suicide. It is a plea for help that we should be answering. This could help. We also know that some of the people who pick up these guns and go shooting children and innocent people have serious mental illness problems. They need counseling, too, and we need to find ways to reach them.

I also want to add that we have a different form of gun violence in big cities like Chicago. Many of these crimes are committed by kids and gangs, and these kids—90 percent-plus of them—have been victims of trauma in their lives. Things have happened to them which they can never forget, and they need help to deal with them. So mental health counseling and trauma counseling are critical to reducing gun violence at all of these different levels.

Importantly, the framework would crack down on the straw purchasing and the illicit trafficking of guns. Last August, an amazing young woman who was a Chicago policewoman, Ella French, was on duty with her partner, sitting in the squad car, when a man walked up and shot her in the head and killed her. Then he shot the other officer and blinded him in one eye. The gun that he used to kill the policewoman was the subject of a straw purchase.

What does that mean? That means that he could never have cleared a background check. He was a convicted felon. So he finds a friend or a girlfriend to go in and buy it—someone who has no criminal record—and then he hands the gun over to him, and he turns around and kills a wonderful Chicago policewoman. The outpouring of sentiment in favor of Ella French and her family was overwhelming.

I hope that we can get this provision, which I have worked on with Senators Collins and Leahy, included in the final passage so as to tighten up the penalties on those who make straw purchases.

If you are going to stand up and lie to buy a gun so that you can give it to someone who can't pass a background check, you ought to pay dearly for that. It cost Ella French her life, and I hope that we stick with this provision all the way through.

The last point is especially important because I have met her mother; I have met the officer who was in the car with her; and I met his family. I know how much this particular incident has meant to each and every one of their lives.

Does an agreement like this do everything that I would like? No, it doesn't, but this, if we can pass it, will be the most significant gun violence reform in 30 years in Congress—30 years. We now have more guns than people in this country. They estimate some 400 million guns. They can't even give me anywhere close to an exact number of how many AR-15s we have in this country. I have heard estimates that people are convinced the number ranges from 10 to 20 million of these AR-15 military assault-type weapons.

We have a long way to go before we reach the finish line, but I want to commend those Senators who have worked so hard to bring us to this point. I will just make it very clear: I am prepared to do everything I can as a Senator and as whip to bring the votes together to get this done as quickly as possible.

#### STUDENT LOAN FORGIVENESS

Now, Madam President, on another matter, 2 weeks ago, the Education Department announced it would wipe out \$5.8 billion in student loan debt owed by 560,000 borrowers who had attended for-profit Corinthian Colleges in the last 20 years. Corinthian Colleges was one of the largest, most corrupt, most unscrupulous companies in the for-profit college industry, but it wasn't alone in its shady dealings—far from it.

So the basic primer on for-profit colleges and universities—the question that you are going to face on the final exam—is this: What two numbers tell the whole story about for-profit colleges and universities? The numbers 8 and 30. What do they mean? Eight percent of high school graduates go to for-profit colleges and universities—8 percent. Thirty percent of all of the student loan defaults in the United States are of students from for-profit colleges and universities.

Why? Why are these students who attend for-profit schools failing to make their student loan payments?

Well, first, these for-profit industry schools charge too much in tuition. The students can't keep up with the debt, so they borrow more. They reach a point where something happens, and they have to drop out—afraid of the debt they have accumulated.

At the next stage, some finish. They take their diplomas from their for-profit schools, and they learn, unfortunately, that they are almost worthless. Westwood College is one of those fraudulent for-profit colleges. It operated 15 campuses in 5 different States, including Illinois—Westwood College. I remember driving out to O'Hare Airport and looking up at the side of one of those tall office buildings. They had a sign for Westwood College, and I thought: What a fraud.

Like the Corinthian Colleges, Westwood used high-pressure sales and marketing tactics and outright lies to pressure students to take on huge amounts of student debt. Students in Westwood's criminal justice program in Illinois were told that a Westwood

criminal justice degree would all but guarantee them a good-paying job with the local police department, maybe even with the FBI. What a lie.

Victoria Vences is one of the thousands of Illinois students who heard those lies and is paying the price for it. Victoria is the first person in her family ever to attend college, and that is the case more often than not. These students come from families with no college experience and don't know where to turn. They look at the advertising and, unfortunately, fall for it. They sign up for these for-profit schools like Westwood.

Victoria enrolled in the criminal justice program at Westwood in 2007, believing it would help her land a job as a probation officer or maybe even with the Immigration Services. After 3 years of juggling full-time jobs and going to school full time, Victoria was shocked to learn that a Westwood degree would not pay off at all. At that time, she owed \$50,000 in student loans that she had taken out at Westwood. Not wanting to take out more loans for a useless degree, she dropped out. She started applying for law enforcement jobs, showing them the certificate of her transcript from Westwood, and they told her that it was worthless.

Victoria now works for the Illinois Domestic Violence Hotline. She likes her job, and she helps a lot of people, but she has never earned enough of an income to make the monthly payments on her student loans. Victoria Vences isn't someone who shirks responsibility. She is helping to raise a niece and a nephew who live with her. She doesn't believe that she should have to pay back \$50,000 in loans because of the deception. I agree.

Last week, I wrote to Education Secretary Miguel Cardona, asking him for a second time—and I like him, but if he doesn't start answering my letters, I am going to have to think of a way to get his attention. I asked him to cancel the student loan debt of all former Westwood criminal justice students in Illinois who were defrauded by this company.

I first made this request in April of last year. It is time for a response, Mr. Secretary.

Last July, the Education Secretary canceled the student loan debts of 1,600 former Westwood students. Among them were 488 Illinois students who had taken on debt to enroll in Westwood's worthless criminal justice program. These students had all applied for relief under something known as borrower defense that allows the Education Department to cancel their student debts.

There are still more than 3,000 Westwood criminal justice students in Illinois who haven't gotten that same break. Some of them, like Victoria Vences, have carried that debt for more than 10 years. It has ruined their credit ratings, and it has made it harder for them to find a job, rent an apartment, or think about a future.

We have known for more than a decade that Westwood used misleading marketing tactics. Now they have to be called to account. The unethical behavior was documented in detail by Illinois' former attorney general, Lisa Madigan, who sued Westwood 10 years ago. I remember that. I joined her in a press conference announcing it.

The Education Department also has concluded that Westwood defrauded its criminal justice program students in Illinois. The Education Department should grant automatic loan forgiveness for all of the approximately 3,000 students who are still burdened with Westwood's criminal justice program deception.

During the Trump years, the Education Department decided to take a blind eye to the situation of these for-profit schools. The Trump administration actually hired people who worked in that industry—for these schools—to regulate them. You can guess what happened—no regulation.

It is time for the Education Department to make a difference, and let me say that it is time for us to make a difference when it comes to student loan debt. It was in 1998 when we decided—in a bill which was loaded with extras that people didn't discover until long after it passed—that you couldn't discard your student loan in bankruptcy. If you had a mortgage on a home and filed for bankruptcy, you could discharge that mortgage, even on a second home, even on a car loan, even on a loan for a boat, even on a loan for appliances—just about everything except a student loan.

Well, that was the wrong decision. That was the wrong policy. There are more than 3 million student loan borrowers who owe more than \$100,000 in student loans, but we have decided these would be nondischargeable in bankruptcy. There is a provision in there that says, if there is an undue hardship, you might be able to discharge your loan. Almost never does a court rule that there is an undue hardship.

This situation is unsustainable. Senator JOHN CORNYN of Texas and I have introduced a bipartisan bill to change it to make sure the Bankruptcy Code gives student debt a break. I will continue working with him and others to get this done. Bankruptcy should always be the last resort, but it ought to be an option for those who truly need relief, and these student borrowers do.

The bottom line: Even with other reform measures, like relief for the Corinthian Colleges students, bankruptcy reform ought to be part of the solution to the student debt crisis. I hope that it will.

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Madam President, I recently received a letter from a man in Chicago who was writing on behalf of his dad who was a Vietnam war vet, and he was writing for hundreds of thousands of other veterans just like his dad.

These people are sick with illnesses connected to their military service.

These veterans served our Nation in many different wars, in many different places, and at many different times in different branches of the military. They have one thing in common: They were unknowingly poisoned with toxic chemicals during their service. They came home from war and thought they were safe as they managed to escape the fate of some of their colleagues, but years and sometimes decades later, they became sick with rare cancers, with debilitating lung diseases, heart conditions, and other illnesses as a result of toxic exposure during their service.

One veteran said:

It's like an I.E.D. that goes off in your body 8 or 10 or 20 years [after you are out of the service].

Al LaHood, who is not related to the Congressman or the Congressman's son, is the father my constituent wrote to me about. Al was 22 years old when he was drafted in the Army, and he went to Vietnam in 1968. He was an infantryman, a machinegunner, stationed at Camp Cu Chi, northwest of Saigon. He came home after a year, with a Bronze Star for valor, but he brought something else home, although he wouldn't know it for almost 50 years. His body had absorbed Agent Orange, the toxic defoliant used by the U.S. military in Vietnam to clear the jungles.

(Ms. DUCKWORTH assumed the Chair.)

After his service, Al LaHood earned a college degree and an MBA, got married, had a family—the American dream.

Every 2 years, he and his Army buddies made a point of having a reunion somewhere. One by one, over the years, his buddies started getting sick. Heart disease, prostate cancer, esophageal cancer—it turns out all related to the toxic exposure to Agent Orange.

Four years ago, the toxic timebomb caught up with Al LaHood. He was diagnosed with a rare form of non-Hodgkin's lymphoma; last year, even worse news—diagnosed with another rare cancer. Doctors tell him he has a 30-percent chance of surviving 5 years.

The VA ruled that his cancers are service-related and declared Al a hundred percent disabled. It amazes him to think that he now receives more in disability compensation each month than he received in combat pay for an entire year in Vietnam.

"People don't understand the true cost of war," Al says.

Exposure to toxic substances is not new. In World War I, it was mustard gas; World War II, exposure to nuclear tests; Vietnam, Agent Orange. In the Persian Gulf wars and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, there was a new form of exposure. It was called burn pits. The military dug massive pits, filled them with everything imaginable—from ruined humvees and aircraft to medical waste, human waste, computers, batteries, plastics—every bit of trash produced in a war on a military

base. Then they doused it all with jet fuel and lit it on fire. The thick black smoke from the fire contained invisible deadly chemicals. They filled the air and covered everything around. And the soldiers, they breathed them into their lungs and into their bodies.

Al LaHood's son said his dad was concerned for the veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan. He hopes they receive early screening, so if they develop cancer, this just might be able to save their lives.

Al and his family say they want more research into the kinds of rare cancers and other illnesses that toxic-exposed veterans developed so they can be detected earlier. Al would give up gladly all of his disability payments if the money could be spent on research for illnesses that might hit his fellow victims exposed to toxic substances.

I want Al LaHood and the hundreds of thousands of toxic-exposed veterans, their families, and caregivers to know the U.S. Senate not only honors your service; we hear your voices.

This week, the Senate is taking up SFC Heath Robinson Honoring Our PACT Act. The PACT Act is the most important piece of veterans legislation in a generation. It is about keeping promises, the promises that we made to veterans that if they risked their lives for our Nation and became wounded as a result, that we would not leave them behind; they would have healthcare and benefits they needed and earned.

The PACT Act builds on the historic Agent Orange Act. Let me, at this point, note that a friend of mine, now deceased, was one of the major movers on the Agent Orange Act of 1991. His name was Lane Evans. He was from the Quad Cities in Illinois. He and I were elected to the U.S. House in the same year, 1982.

Lane was a Vietnam-era veteran who came back determined to help his fellow veterans, and he made Agent Orange his cause. He recognized that illnesses caused by Agent Orange are actually war wounds and should be treated that way.

The PACT Act takes that principle that Congressman Lane Evans stood for and applies it to other situations. It applies it to all American veterans from all wars who were exposed to toxic chemicals during their service, whether overseas or in the United States.

As we continue to learn about the cost of exposure, it provides a framework to add more conditions related to toxic exposure in the future. Veterans will no longer have to fight a second war with the VA to prove their illness was service-related. They can focus on fighting their disease instead of fighting the bureaucracy.

It is estimated that the PACT Act will affect 1 out of every 5 veterans—3.5 million veterans in all. The act directs the VA to devote resources and personnel needed to process new claims and treat new patients.

In another provision, which I strongly support, the PACT Act directs the VA to work collaboratively with the Department of Defense and Health and Human Services and EPA—a whole-of-government search for better ways to detect, treat, and cure these hidden deadly wounds of war. Our veterans deserve nothing else.

I have heard some critics say: This is going to cost a lot of money.

Right. It just might do that. But can you think of a more deserving cause? Can you think of anything better than for us to really face the true causes of war than to stand by our veterans?

Madam President, you know that story far better than I do.

I have long supported this whole-of-government approach to research—especially at the VA—and treatment for our veterans.

Many VA researchers are veterans themselves, determined to find innovative treatment and cures.

I commend Senator JON TESTER of Montana and Senator JERRY MORAN—they are the chairman and ranking member of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee—for their leadership in producing this excellent, timely, and historic bipartisan bill.

I especially thank the more than 60 veteran service organizations, like the VFW—I spoke to their statewide convention in Springfield just last Friday—and so many others that helped produce this bill and the veterans who fought to reach this point—fought sometimes literally with their last breath.

I will vote proudly for the PACT Act. I urge my colleagues to do the same.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk called the roll.

Mr. CORNYN. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

#### GUN VIOLENCE

Mr. CORNYN. Madam President, tomorrow will mark 3 weeks since the devastating school shooting in Uvalde, TX.

Over those last 3 weeks, Senator MURPHY from Connecticut, Senator SINEMA from Arizona, Senator TILLIS from North Carolina, and others have been working to identify steps that Congress should take to prevent similar tragedies from occurring in the future.

This is not an easy debate. It is emotional. It can be divisive, but it is also very important that we act.

Most often, you hear people say: Do something. Well, they don't give you a lot of guidance on what that something looks like. And when you begin to dig down into the details, you find out that there is not a lot of consensus about what that something should look like.

The good news is, as a result of the work we have been doing these last 3

weeks, working with our colleagues, I believe we are making good progress.

Over the weekend, there was an agreement reached between 20 Senators—10 Republicans and 10 Democrats—on a framework, or principles, for bipartisan legislation to keep our kids and our communities safe.

Before I go through some of the details of this agreed framework, I want to explain what it does and what it does not include.

From the beginning, I promised my constituents that when I took an oath to uphold the Constitution and laws of the United States, I did not take that oath with the intention of violating it. And so I said at the outset I would not support any additional restrictions on the rights of law-abiding gun owners.

There are hundreds of millions of guns in America today, and the vast majority—almost all of those gun owners—are responsible. They are not a threat to public safety. And so this being a constitutional right to keep and bear arms, there is no basis to restrict the rights of law-abiding gun owners or to restrict the constitutional rights of many of our citizens.

I made clear this is a redline of mine from the outset. And this bipartisan agreement on principles makes good on that commitment.

The gun-related provisions in this proposal will only impact criminals and those adjudicated mentally ill. Law-abiding gun owners will not be subject to any new restrictions, period.

Our agreement also strengthens the existing background check system, something we have had strong bipartisan support for and where we have had some notable successes in the past, for example, the Fix NICS bill that passed after this tragic Sutherland Springs shooting, where an individual, who should not have been able to get a firearm because of his record of felonies and domestic violence and mental health commitments, was able to do so because the Air Force had not uploaded that information into the background check system.

I am proud of the fact that, on a bipartisan basis, we passed that legislation which compelled Federal Agencies to post this derogatory information, which disqualifies people under current law, into the National Instant Criminal Background Check System. Since 2018, when that bill was signed into law, there have been 11½ million new records uploaded into the background check system.

As I said, our agreement on the background check system in this particular legislation is an attempt to try to make sure that existing law works the way Congress intended. I am very proud of the bipartisan work that led to this framework, and I am eager to share more with my Republican colleagues this week.

The various portions of this proposal can be grouped into three broad categories.

One is mental health support. To prevent violence, we need to improve the

availability and accessibility of mental health services across the country. If you look at the profile of these young, male shooters—whether it is in Sandy Hook or it is in Uvalde, TX—they fit a familiar profile: alienated from their peers, suffering increasingly deteriorating mental health, not getting any treatment. It is like circling down the drain. Unless they get some help, they are likely to do what, unfortunately, too many of our young people do, and that is commit suicide. In the case of Adam Lanza in Sandy Hook and Salvador Ramos in Uvalde, they not only commit suicide—because they know they are not coming out of this alive—but they take innocent lives with them. So access to mental health support is absolutely critical.

So, too, is the investment in our schools. This includes everything from physically hardening school buildings to training personnel, to more effective violence prevention efforts. We know at Uvalde the door had a lock on it but it didn't work, allowing the shooter easy access to this elementary school.

All of our students—all—deserve to feel safe in their schools, and no parent should send their child to school worried that they may not come home. They deserve to know their child will be safe at school and the peace of mind that goes along with that. That is why I think these resources for additional school hardening of that soft target is very important.

The final portion provides targeted reforms to keep guns out of the hands of individuals who already, by law, should not have guns to begin with. Our proposal includes resources for States to implement crisis intervention orders.

Now, some have talked about red flag laws, but that is actually a broader category than red flag laws that exist in 16 States. As I said, some of this assistance for crisis intervention orders will help administer existing red flag laws, but my hope is that others will qualify for these resources for other important measures to help provide support for our communities to aid in crisis intervention, things like assisted outpatient treatment centers. As I said, 16 States have red flag laws. Texas does not, and they certainly shouldn't miss out on access to those resources for crisis intervention.

But one of the things you hear people concerned with most when it comes to these red flag laws where people who are found, after an adjudication, to be a danger to themselves and others and can lose access to their firearms on a temporary basis—it is absolutely critical that each and every one of those includes protection that comes from due process of law and particularly when it comes to the rights of law-abiding gun owners.

Our framework also includes protections for victims of domestic violence. It shouldn't matter whether the victim is married to their abuser; if the abuser is convicted of domestic violence, they

should not be able to purchase a firearm.

Our proposal also cracks down on illegal sellers and manufacturers of firearms, like the man who sold a gun to the shooter who killed 7 people and injured 25 others in Midland and Odessa out in West Texas. The shooter knew he couldn't pass a traditional background test, so he traveled to Lubbock, TX, and purchased a firearm from somebody who made knockoff AR-15s out of parts that he purchased over the internet. And, of course, no background check was done, and tragedy ensued.

Our provisions also include a review of juvenile records for buyers under the age of 21. In Uvalde, Salvador Ramos was able to pass a background check only because no one had any insight—official insight—into his tortured background. I have said before he was a ticking time bomb: somebody who mutilated himself; threatened assaults, including sexual assaults, against his fellow students; somebody who posted pictures online of the weapons that he had bought and threatened online to go shoot up a school.

We need to know before somebody walks in and buys a firearm when they turn 18 what their mental health and criminal record history looks like, to the extent feasible. Then we need to incentivize more States, like the States of South Carolina and Virginia that currently upload mental health adjudications even for juveniles.

To be clear, we agreed on a press statement, a set of principles. That was very important and hard-fought. But now comes the even more difficult task of trying to agree on legislative text to actually implement those principles, and that is what we are working on this week. My hope is that we can complete that job in the next few days—hopefully by the end of the week—so that the bill will be available for all Senators—indeed, all the world—to read, and then Senator SCHUMER will have that available, should he choose to do so, to put it on the floor of the Senate next week.

There has been a lot of talk and speculation in the press about what was included in the bill, and I am pleased to say that I believe the principles we came up with will save lives. To me, that is the ultimate goal, just like the legislation we passed in 2018 to fix the background check system after Sutherland Springs.

I believe the principles we have articulated, if carried out in legislative text, which I expect them to be, will save lives. That is our goal. But we also understand that we are operating here in the Senate with a 60-vote threshold, that 59 votes won't get it and any lesser number will not allow us to vote to close off debate and then to pass a bill. So I want to just talk about ideas that were left out of this deal because we knew they would jeopardize our ability to get to 60 votes.

There was a lot of desire on both sides to include additional things, but

they were excluded in large part because of our necessity of getting to 60 votes in order to get a bill—for example, proposals on universal background checks, assault weapon bans for 18- to 21-year-olds, mandatory waiting periods, a 21-day waiting period for purchases of all firearms for 18- to 21-year-olds, high-capacity magazine bans, unconstitutional mandatory safe storage requirements of all firearms in homes, licensing requirements for purchasing an assault weapon, criminal penalties for negligent storage of firearms in a home, and low mens rea—that is a criminal state of mind—standard for straw purchasing and trafficking firearms.

All of these had been proposed by either President Biden or many of our Democratic colleagues and were not included in the statement of principles that was agreed to by 10 Republicans and 10 Democrats. We knew including any of these components would jeopardize our ability to get a deal. So anytime our Democratic colleagues tried to push the envelope as far as they could, we had to remind them of that requirement and push back.

Again, my view, my redline, my starting point, my premise in all of this is law-abiding gun owners are not the problem. Law-abiding gun owners who have passed a background check have a Second Amendment right to purchase a firearm, and no limitation on their rights is going to prevent shootings like Uvalde or Sandy Hook or Sutherland Springs. So focusing on the problem, which is keeping criminals and people with mental health problems from purchasing firearms under existing law, I believe, is the right formula to build consensus and get a bill on the President's desk.

We are still working, as I said, through a lot of the details, but I am encouraged about where things stand right now. As I said, my goal all along is the art of the possible. That is what politics is; it is the art of the possible. It is not everything I want and nothing you want or everything you want and nothing I want. That is how not to get a deal. That is how not to accomplish anything.

I am hoping that 10 Republicans supporting the bill is not a ceiling but is the floor, and we intend to continue to work with our colleagues to help them understand these principles that we have agreed to, the 20 of us, and to write legislative text that can earn broad bipartisan support, maybe supermajority support, here in the U.S. Senate.

I want to personally thank our colleagues Senator MURPHY, Senator SINEMA, and Senator TILLIS for working in good faith to get us to this point, as well as a number of other Senators who contributed to this bipartisan proposal.

We still have a lot of work ahead of us. I think in many ways this is the beginning—not the middle or the end—of our work because now we need to put

these principles into legislative text, and then we need to get it on the Senate floor, get it passed, get it passed in the House, and then get it to President Biden's desk.

I will be sharing further updates with my colleagues in the Republican conference this week, and I hope, working together with Senator TILLIS and others, to build additional support on our side of the aisle.

#### U.S. SUPREME COURT

Madam President, I just want to close on one final note. The bipartisan work that we have done here in the Senate on this school safety, mental health, and gun safety bill is a sharp contrast from what is happening on the other side of the Capitol. House Democrats, unfortunately, have a history of prioritizing politics over policy, but now, their games have reached a dangerous low. I am talking about the safety and security of the members of the U.S. Supreme Court and their families.

It has been more than a month since the Senate passed bipartisan legislation to protect them from threats of violence. The legislation Mr. COONS, a Senator from Delaware, and I introduced—a bipartisan bill—passed the Senate unanimously. Do you think that happens every day? Not by a long shot. To get all 100 Senators to support a piece of legislation means it is really not controversial. But, unfortunately, once it went to the House, it sat there and languished for a month.

Even as members of the Supreme Court and their families are being threatened, the House hasn't allowed a vote on that bipartisan bill. The reason given by our Democratic colleagues in the House is, well, they want to extend further protection to Court employees and their families. That could include around-the-clock security details for everyone from clerks to IT staff and their spouses, children, siblings, and parents. That makes a mockery of what Senator COONS and I tried to do.

All we wanted to do is give the police at the Supreme Court the very same authority that the Capitol Police have to provide protective details to Members of Congress. In fact, the leadership in both Houses have permanent details assigned to them, but if a Member of Congress receives a credible threat, Capitol Police will provide a protective detail for them. That is all we want to do for the members of the Supreme Court and their families.

Last week, we received a terrifying reminder of the failure to act and what the consequences of that might be. U.S. marshals arrested a man outside of Justice Kavanaugh's home who had traveled all the way from California to assassinate a sitting Justice on the U.S. Supreme Court. When he was arrested, he had a Glock 17 semiautomatic pistol. He had ammunition, a knife, a crowbar, and some zip ties. He told authorities his plan was to break into Justice Kavanaugh's house, kill Justice Kavanaugh, and then commit

suicide. That was his plan. Thank goodness law enforcement authorities were able to stop him.

But this close call immediately set off calls for the House to pass the bipartisan legislation that I was discussing a moment ago—again, that passed unanimously in the Senate a month ago—but unfortunately, House Democrats have still refused to do that. They still claim that the law clerks and other Supreme Court staff who were virtually anonymous to the public are in dire need of protection too. I think this is pretty transparently a stalling tactic. It is a pretty lame excuse for not providing the Supreme Court Justices and their families with the very same protection that Capitol Police provide Members of Congress.

The bill that the Democratic House Members say they want to pass instead was introduced on May 10, almost 5 weeks ago, but they haven't even voted on that bill yet. Again, this is a transparent attempt to stall legislation that passed 100 to 0. If House Democrats actually believed in the snake oil they are trying to sell, they would have passed their own bill a month ago, but they didn't, and they haven't. They wasted precious time and left Justices' families vulnerable to grave danger.

If House Democrats want to vote on a bill that extends protection to other people, including the leaker of the Supreme Court opinion, they are welcome to try to do so, but first, they need to pass the bipartisan bill Senator COONS and I introduced.

The line between legitimate public discourse and acts of violence has been crossed, and House Democrats cannot continue to turn a blind eye. We don't have time to spare when it comes to protecting the members of the Court and their families. If, Heaven forbid, something were to happen because of a lack of authority that would be conferred by the Supreme Court Police Parity Act, shame on Members of the House of Representatives. It would be on them for their failure to act on this commonsense, bipartisan bill.

Madam President, the House needs to pass the Supreme Court Police Parity Act today and, if not today, tomorrow. I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Iowa.

#### FREE SPEECH

Mr. GRASSLEY. Madam President, there has been a lot of well-deserved attention to free expression limits on college campuses. My colleagues have heard me right here on this very Senate floor speak about the need for free expression many times. But one reason we have this issue at colleges is because students aren't exposed to the diverse ideas in our public schools and other K-12 institutions. So when brandnew college students encounter opposing ideas for the first time, you have heard it—they lash out. They demand what are called safe spaces on the college campuses.

Now, that tells me that students are coming to college very unprepared to hear diverse views. If your own views have never been challenged, then you almost certainly have not developed the skills to evaluate different viewpoints and then go ahead and make up your own mind.

So let's raise this question: Why are students arriving in college so resistant to hearing diverse views?

I have been following some news stories on this subject last month, and all of this may not be entirely accidental, that our high school students aren't prepared to hear diverse viewpoints when they get to college.

The American Federation of Teachers recently announced that it wants to put an extension on the computers of its 1.7 million members. The goal of this NewsGuard extension is to provide "trust ratings" of news websites. Although numerous studies have pointed to a clear leftwing bias from NewsGuard, the AFT still wanted to bring it into the classrooms across America. Now, that should not be our goal. Our goal should be to get political bias out of K-12 schools, not ingrain it.

Contrariwise, a major focus that I have heard from Iowa teachers has been that we need to develop among our students critical thinking. Well, critical thinking requires listening to different ideas. If all students just agree with their teachers, that is repetition, not independent thinking.

The disease that has infected so many colleges now seems to spread throughout our K-12 schools. I hope for our country's future we find a way to continue to show kids both sides of an argument rather than shutting down ideas that teachers may disagree with. I have heard from many Iowans concerned about exactly that kind of bias. But we can't fix it here in Washington, DC.

The first rule of education policy should be that decisions are made as close to the family as possible. If you have issues with how your school is being run, your local school board should be your very first step. These elected officials are directly accountable to the parents in their own communities. A problem should only go up to the State legislature if it is caused by State law, and only a select few issues should go to this national level, where Federal intervention is found out to be the source of the problem.

So if you see political bias or lack of diverse viewpoints in your kids' school, go to the people who can fix it. Make your voice heard both at school board meetings and at the ballot box.

#### BORDER SECURITY

Madam President, on another subject, we had the good fortune of hearing a series of speeches last week led by my colleague from Iowa, JONI ERNST, on the critical situation at our southern border, with people violating our laws, coming into this country, and almost being invited into this country in violation of our laws because our



laws say you need the permission of the United States to come to this country.

So I didn't speak last week on that subject, but, as I have done on a number of occasions otherwise, I want to once again come to my colleagues about the border crisis created by President Biden, Secretary Mayorkas, and maybe more throughout this administration.

The crisis at our southern border is one of the top issues I hear at my county meetings. Iowans are understandably upset by President Biden's policies that have incentivized illegal immigration and created a historic crisis at the southern border.

In the first 15 months of this administration, U.S. Customs and Border Protection—CBP, as we call it—has experienced over 2.7 million encounters with illegal immigrants at the southern border. That number is staggering. It is larger than the population of 15 States and Washington, DC. It is almost three times larger than the President's home State of Delaware.

Make no mistake about it, this crisis is entirely the fault of President Biden and the policies that he put in place almost his first day in office.

Since taking office, this administration has terminated physical barrier construction at the southern border. In other words, the wall that works to keep people from entering our country was stopped being built.

Next, this administration attempted to severely limit the ability of ICE to deport illegal immigrants; also attempted to terminate the "Remain in Mexico" policy; rolled back asylum co-operative agreements; openly supported sanctuary city policies; embraced mass catch-and-release policies; put forward mass-amnesty legislative proposals that would do nothing to secure the border; and even attempted to terminate title 42 without any plan in place to deal with what happened when we increased the number of people illegally crossing our border from about 6 to 7,000 a day to 18,000 a day, and that figure comes from the estimates of our own executive branch government.

Now, listing all these things, therefore, it shouldn't be a surprise to see a record-shattering surge of illegal immigration at our southern border. This is what happens when you make it clear that you have no intention of fully enforcing the Nation's immigration laws or cracking down on illegal immigration.

As I have said before, it is an unfortunate reality that the President and his administration believe the surge in illegal immigration at the southern border due to his policies is a process to be managed rather than a crisis to be stopped. Until that mindset changes, this historic crisis at our southern border will continue. And President Biden, Secretary Mayorkas, and the irresponsible and reckless policies of this administration deserve all of the blame for the situation that we are in.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. MORAN. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

H.R. 3967

Mr. MORAN. Madam President, as you know, the Senate is currently considering the Heath Robinson Honoring Our PACT Act. This bipartisan legislation is the most comprehensive toxic exposure bill ever considered for veterans.

My colleagues deserve a fair consideration of common sense and reasonable amendments to improve this bill for our veterans. The House of Representatives had six votes and adopted 27 amendments. Part of the agreement between the chairman, Chairman TESTER, and I was that amendments would be considered for this legislation; and, specifically, I have pushed for two amendments to be considered.

Given the magnitude and size of this legislation, there needs to be a bipartisan process, and given the magnitude of the bipartisan support of this legislation, there needs to be a bipartisan process on the Senate floor; and I would ask the leadership of the Senate to make certain that is the case.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. TESTER. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. TESTER. Madam President, the Senate has a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to pass bipartisan legislation this week. The Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson Honoring Our PACT Act will honor this country's commitment to our country's toxin-exposed veterans and their families.

Generation after generation of veterans have been exposed to toxic substances during their time serving this country. And when they return from their military service, they have faced yet another battle right here at home—that battle to get the care and benefits that they have earned and that they desperately need.

In the worst cases, folks are praying and praying with the price of their lives—veterans and heroes like SFC Heath Robinson, for whom this bill is named. Like many Americans, Heath answered the call of duty and deployed to Kosovo and Iraq with the Ohio National Guard.

When he deployed, he was a healthy and active soldier. While deployed, he was exposed to toxins from burn pits. And 13 years—13 short years—after his

deployment, he lost his life to a rare autoimmune disease and stage 4 lung cancer, conditions undoubtedly related to his exposure to toxins from burn pits while he was on active duty serving this Nation.

Heath left behind an 8-year-old daughter. He also left behind a wife and family. And this family is now committed to ensuring that this country provides for other veterans what it could not provide for Heath—the support he needed to survive.

This bill will address decades of inaction and failure by our Government. It expands eligibility for VA healthcare to more than 3½ million combat veterans exposed to burn pits, supporting our post-9/11 and Vietnam-era veterans by removing the burden of proof for 23 presumptive conditions caused by toxic exposure, from cancers to lung disease.

It establishes a framework for the establishment of future presumptions of service-related toxic exposures, giving the VA the tools it needs to bolster its workforce, establish more healthcare facilities, and improve the claims process to better meet the immediate and future needs of every veteran that the VA serves.

There is always a cost to war. And we often look at it with ships and airplanes and tanks, but the fact is, the cost of the wars we have fought are never fully paid. This bill will help right that wrong.

Congress has a chance to show our Nation's veterans that their government has their back. Our men and women in uniform answered the call of duty. The Presiding Officer of the Senate knows exactly what I am talking about. They upheld their end of the bargain; we need to uphold ours.

Madam President, I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. TESTER. I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. TESTER. I ask unanimous consent that we yield back all time and the vote occur right now.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

CLOTURE MOTION

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Pursuant to rule XXII, the Chair lays before the Senate the pending cloture motion, which the clerk will state.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, do hereby move to bring to a close debate on Tester substitute amendment No. 5051 to Calendar No. 388, H.R. 3967, a bill to improve health care and benefits for veterans exposed to toxic substances, and for other purposes.

Charles E. Schumer, Jon Tester, Tammy Duckworth, Robert P. Casey, Jr., Margaret Wood Hassan, Kyrsten Sinema,

Mark Kelly, Christopher Murphy, Sherrod Brown, Tina Smith, Jacky Rosen, Benjamin L. Cardin, Jack Reed, Tammy Baldwin, Jeanne Shaheen, Mazie Hirono, Ben Ray Lujan.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. By unanimous consent, the mandatory quorum call has been waived.

The question is, Is it the sense of the Senate that debate on amendment No. 5051, offered by the Senator from Montana, Mr. TESTER, to H.R. 3967, a bill to improve health care and benefits for veterans exposed to toxic substances, and for other purposes, shall be brought to a close?

The yeas and nays are mandatory under the rule.

The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from Georgia (Mr. WARNOCK) is necessarily absent.

Mr. THUNE. The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Senator from Texas (Mr. CRUZ), the Senator from Louisiana (Mr. KENNEDY), the Senator from Nebraska (Mr. SASSE), and the Senator from Mississippi (Mr. WICKER).

The yeas and nays resulted—yeas 78, nays 17, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 225 Leg.]

#### YEAS—78

Baldwin	Fischer	Murkowski
Barrasso	Gillibrand	Murphy
Bennet	Graham	Murray
Blumenthal	Grassley	Ossoff
Blunt	Hagerty	Padilla
Booker	Hassan	Peters
Boozman	Hawley	Reed
Braun	Heinrich	Rosen
Brown	Hickenlooper	Rounds
Cantwell	Hirono	Rubio
Capito	Hoeven	Sanders
Cardin	Hyde-Smith	Schatz
Carper	Inhofe	Schumer
Casey	Johnson	Scott (FL)
Cassidy	Kaine	Shaheen
Collins	Kelly	Sinema
Coons	King	Smith
Cornyn	Klobuchar	Stabenow
Cortez Masto	Leahy	Tester
Cotton	Lujan	Thune
Cramer	Manchin	Van Hollen
Daines	Markey	Warner
Duckworth	Marshall	Warren
Durbin	Menendez	Whitehouse
Ernst	Merkley	Wyden
Feinstein	Moran	Young

#### NAYS—17

Blackburn	McConnell	Shelby
Burr	Paul	Sullivan
Crapo	Portman	Tillis
Lankford	Risch	Toomey
Lee	Romney	Tuberville
Lummis	Scott (SC)	

#### NOT VOTING—5

Cruz	Sasse	Wicker
Kennedy	Warnock	

(Mr. SCHATZ assumed the Chair.)

(Ms. BALDWIN assumed the Chair.)

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. HEINRICH). On this vote, the yeas are 78, the nays are 17.

Three-fifths of the Senators duly chosen and sworn having voted in the affirmative, the motion is agreed to.

The Senator from Arizona.

### EXECUTIVE SESSION

#### EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Ms. SINEMA. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to executive session to consider the following nominations en bloc: Calendar Nos. 990, 991, and 992; that the Senate vote on the nominations en bloc without intervening action or debate; that the motions to reconsider be considered made and laid upon table; that any statements related to the nominations be printed in the RECORD; that the President be immediately notified of the Senate's action; and the Senate resume legislative session.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The question is, Will the Senate advise and consent to the nominations of Joshua D. Hurwit, of Idaho, to be United States Attorney for the District of Idaho, for the term of four years; Gerard M. Karam, of Pennsylvania, to be United States Attorney for the Middle District of Pennsylvania for the term of four years; and Jacqueline C. Romero, of Pennsylvania, to be United States Attorney for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania for the term of four years en bloc?

The nominations were confirmed en bloc.

### LEGISLATIVE SESSION

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senate will now resume legislative session.

### MORNING BUSINESS

#### 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF JUNETEENTH IN PORTLAND, OREGON

Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, Senator MERKLEY and I wish to recognize the 50th anniversary of the Juneteenth Oregon Celebration in our hometown of Portland, OR. Every year on June 19, people in Portland and across the State of Oregon and the Nation join together to celebrate when, on June 19, 1865, more than 250,000 enslaved people in Texas were finally declared free more than 2 years after the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation. Juneteenth is a celebration of freedom and recognition that emancipation was delayed for many enslaved people even after the Civil War was over. This day is among the most important days of commemoration in our Nation.

The Juneteenth celebration was brought to Oregon in 1945 by the late and beloved community leader Clara Peoples. She led the first-ever Juneteenth celebration in Oregon at work. When her supervisor told her that if the celebration ran over 15 minutes she would be fired, she announced to her coworkers, "Hear ye, hear ye. It's Juneteenth. We have 15 minutes to

celebrate." Thanks to Clara's tireless efforts in the community and her work to create the nonprofit organization Juneteenth OR, the first official city-wide celebration of Juneteenth occurred 50 years ago on June 19, 1972—and is today celebrated with a parade and other festivities like delicious food, art and live music.

Clara Peoples continued fighting for her community by lobbying at all levels of government to make Juneteenth a recognized holiday on the State and national level. While, sadly, Clara did not live to see her efforts realized, she clearly paved the way for Juneteenth to at long last be declared a Federal holiday and a State holiday in Oregon. Today, we remember and honor her as, in the words of the Rev. Dr. Ronald Myers, "the mother of Juneteenth."

Soon after Clara Peoples passed away in 2015, her granddaughters Jenelle Jack and Jynnefer Robinson took over as leaders of Juneteenth OR. Jenelle and Jynnefer continue to champion this special and important event, creating and coordinating online celebrations for 2 years during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic. They even sent Oregon's candidate for last year's Miss Juneteenth, Aceia Spade from Eugene, OR, to Galveston, TX, where she was crowned National Miss Juneteenth Queen. It was through Jenelle and Jynnefer's efforts—and the efforts of the dedicated staff and volunteers of Juneteenth OR—that Portlanders and Oregonians across the State will once again be able to celebrate Juneteenth in person this year. We look forward to another Clara Peoples Freedom Trail Parade this year, as well as another Miss Juneteenth competition where young Black women will have the opportunity to showcase who they are, their talents, and their confidence.

While celebrating a victory in the fight to keep the film "Birth of a Nation," which celebrated the terrorism of the Ku Klux Klan, from being played in Portland, another Oregon hero and notable civil rights advocate Beatrice Morrow Cannady said, "human rights, the greatest of all rights, and human happiness once again triumphed." So we want to say that when enslaved people in Texas finally learned that they were free, human rights and human happiness triumphed. When Juneteenth became a citywide celebration in Portland 50 years ago, human rights and human happiness triumphed. When Juneteenth became a national holiday in 2021, human rights and human happiness triumphed. And now, on the 50th anniversary of Portland's first Juneteenth and the first time that Oregon has recognized this important day as a State holiday, human rights and human happiness have triumphed.

Juneteenth is an opportunity to celebrate the emancipation of Black Americans and progress made in the fight for human rights and human happiness. It is also a reminder, however, that the fight for true equity for all Americans is far from over. Together, we must